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SIPDIS
OFDA SAN JOSE FOR CALLAGHAN AND GELMAN
OFDA WASHINGTON FOR KATHLEEN MARTIN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAID](#) [SENV](#) [PREF](#) [SOCI](#) [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: DISASTER DECLARATION: COLOMBIAN FOREST FIRES

REF: A) 09 STATE 124728; B) BOGOTA 15

11. SUMMARY: In response to the increasing number and severity of forest fires that have affected 98 municipalities in 12 departments across Colombia, the Chief of Mission has determined that the disaster is of sufficient magnitude to warrant U.S. Government assistance. The damage has exceeded the effective capacity of the Colombian Government (GOC) to respond. The Ministers of Defense, Environment, and Interior have jointly requested USG assistance and it is in the best interest of the USG to respond immediately. The Chief of Mission is therefore exercising his Disaster Assistance Authority. END SUMMARY.

12. Forest fires began in late December as a result of drought conditions (reftel B). Since then, the fires have quickly escalated and approximately 363 fires now affect 98 municipalities in 12 departments, impacting 3,034 hectares of land.

13. On January 8, with President Uribe's approval the GOC's Ministry of Interior and Justice issued a departmental and district-level Disaster Declaration for 11 departments and Bogota, D.C. and ordered GOC authorities to develop an action plan to respond to the forest fires.

14. At the request of Ambassador Brownfield, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) sent a forest fire expert to Colombia to work with US MILGROUP and GOC authorities, including the Ministries of Defense and Environment and Colombian military authorities, to conduct a needs assessment and make recommendations to the GOC and USG.

15. The working group's needs assessment identified the following recommendations: technical assistance from OFDA forest fire experts to work with GOC authorities to establish an information command center within the GOC Risk Management Center; support to develop the plan of action ordered in the GOC Disaster Declaration; protection equipment for forest-fighting teams (e.g., uniforms, gloves, helmets, masks); forest-fighting equipment (e.g., fire hoses, water pumps, chainsaws, scythes, GPS and digital meteorological devices); manual forest-fighting tools (e.g., forest

spades, back water pumps, machetes); and logistical support for fire-fighting teams (e.g., rations, first aid kits).

¶6. The COM authority of \$50,000 may be used to procure the aforementioned assistance. Funds will likely be channeled through the Colombian Red Cross.

¶7. Additional funds and relief supplies may be requested based on gaps identified by the OFDA Regional Advisors and the Mission Disaster Relief Officer (MDRO).

¶8. For additional and ongoing information on the Colombian forest fires, please see the following websites:

- GOC/DPAD - <http://www.sigpad.gov.co/>
- The Colombian Red Cross <http://www.cruzrojacolombiana.org>

BROWNFIELD